

And now: turnkey

The construction manager role, established in an effort to cut costs of federal buildings constructed for the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration (GSA), has A-E firms and general contractors somewhat upset about its impact on them and their traditional roles (ENR 9/23 p.56). And now, in a second significant departure from usual practice by federal agencies, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed that it will help finance sewage works contracted for under the turnkey method—combining design and construction.

The reaction to EPA's proposed new policy permitting turnkey contracts is more violent than the reaction to construction managers has been. For one thing, GSA telegraphed its punch well in advance, explaining to construction industry groups its intent and purpose in engaging a construction manager who would coordinate design with construction and help to compress the total time the normally separated processes take. EPA, on the other hand, simply published its proposed support for the turnkey approach in the FEDERAL REGISTER of Sept. 15, intending to give interested parties 30 days to submit their views (to Director, Grants Administration Division, EPA, Washington, D.C., 20460).

The turnkey approach to waste treatment works is a far more complicated concept than the construction manager idea. It presupposes that performance specifications will be the basis for lump-sum contracting for the full responsibility of design and construction, plus operation for a specified period to prove that the performance specifications have been met.

According to one report, "process design firms and equipment manufacturers" proposed the turnkey method to EPA. But last week at the Water Pollution Control Federation meeting in San Francisco, there was ample evidence that state and municipal officials, consulting engineers and suppliers of equipment for waste water treatment are ready to fight the proposed move (see p. 13). Their opposition caused EPA to allow a 45-day extension of the normal 30-day period in which to register objections.

EPA claims to have concluded from more than a year's study that the turnkey option might be the way to cut paper work, encourage use of new technology and insure that completed plants work as intended—all very desirable objectives. But those who argue against the proposal raise valid questions, such as: who will evaluate proposals? who will dare to throw out low bidders? who will test and judge performance? and who will enforce guarantees on operation, as well as operating costs?

The proposed turnkey option rates serious, unemotional study. Surely it deserves the extended period it now will have for discussion before it can become EPA policy. Such discussion might well include

the idea of moving instead to the construction management method for coordinating, compressing and cutting the costs of sewage works construction, without disturbing the responsibilities for design and performance presently assigned to knowledgeable consulting engineers and equipment suppliers.

Maybe Morton's the man

Rogers C. B. Morton has been head of the Interior Department for the better part of a year, but it is still hard to judge his stewardship over energy resources, the environment and the other responsibilities of the far-flung department.

He is off to a good start (see p. 27). Westerners, highly dubious of an Interior Secretary from the East, have largely been won over. Many long-needed staff changes have been made. He has knocked down unrealistic, grandiose schemes for transporting water impractically long distances. And he has shown his willingness to advocate unpopular causes, such as nuclear power generation.

His grasp of Interior's problems appears firm after his swing through western states this summer. He no doubt has a greater appreciation for the mine field he is treading between overly zealous environmental reformers and the growing need for energy. So far, his instinct for walking this narrow and uncomfortable line appears uncanny.

This much should be applauded. But on the other hand, there is little solid achievement in his record. He is still hedging on a go-ahead decision for the Alaskan pipeline, apparently wanting to be sure that the design is environmentally fail-safe and that he'll not be accused of having the same fire-from-the-hip attitude of his predecessor, Walter Hickel.

And despite considerable lobbying and optimism on Morton's part, there is little to indicate that the Administration's proposal to create a Department of Natural Resources is anywhere near congressional approval. Without approval of such a department, many of his grand schemes may die aborning. Little in the way of legislative progress occurs during an election year, so a try for the reorganization plan really must come this year.

Without the reorganization, it is unlikely that Morton will be able to use effectively his self-confessed talents as a manager. These talents, which he says were honed during his days of running the family milling business, are important, but perhaps not as important as his ability to sell Interior's programs to Congress and the White House. Interior might benefit most if he concentrated his time on winning these legislative and bureaucratic battles and left day-to-day management to his deputies.

If he does that, his record might show more accomplishments and fewer promises.